

# THE SYMPOSIUM: THE GUEST LIST FOR THE PARTY

**Setting:** Apollodorus is telling what happened at Agathôn's house in Athens, 404 BCE (just a few years before Socrates' execution in 399 BCE and a few months before Alcibiades' assassination)

- ❖ **Apollodorus:** The fictional narrator who recollects what happened at Agathôn's party.
- ❖ **Anonymous Companion:** An Athenian (?) friend of Apollodorus
- ❖ **Agathôn:** Retired professional poet, former winner of many tragic poetry contests and host of the current party. The party-goers make many puns on his "good" or "handsome" name (*agathôs*=Greek for "good," a synonym for *kalos*=Greek for "handsome" or "hot.")
- ❖ **Socrates:** The great philosopher, declared the wisest man in Greece by the Delphic Oracle. He is the mentor of Plato, Glaucôn, and Aristodemus in matters of abstract virtue, but in mundane matters a bit of a bumbler who cannot find the right house initially because he is so lost in thought.
- ❖ **Plato:** Author of *The Symposium*, a disciple of Socrates. He's in general much more mystical than his teacher while Socrates is much more open-ended
- ❖ **Glaucôn:** Plato's brother and part-time philosopher who dabbles in these debates
- ❖ **Aristodemus:** Student of Socrates, represents the "erotic pull" of knowledge
- ❖ **Phaedrus:** A hypochondriac literary critic
- ❖ **Pausanias:** Agathôn's younger male lover--not to be confused with the much later Hellenistic Pausanias, the obsessive religious pilgrim who wrote the famous *Journey Through Greece*.
- ❖ **Eryximachus:** A doctor who specializes in the opposition of bodily humors
- ❖ **Aristophanes:** A comic playwright, author of *Lysistrata*, *The Frogs*, *The Clouds*, *the Wasps*, etc. His performance is a bit unsettled by untimely hiccoughs.
- ❖ **Alcibiades:** A handsome and brilliant--but notoriously dissolute--young politician from one of the dominant families in Athenian government, mentored by the great orator Pericles. Alcibiades has pursued Socrates sexually for years, but the old philosopher has continually rebuffed him. This is the same Alcibiades who will later be banished from Athens for blaspheming against Mystery Cult of Deméter and who will switch sides and become a mercenary general for first the Spartans and later for the Persians when they seek to conquer Greece again.

## **Mentioned (but offstage or otherwise suspiciously absent):**

- ❖ **Aristotle**--This young stripling will become Plato's most famous pupil.
- ❖ **Gorgias**--Think of a fifth-century Athenians Tony Robbins or Dale Carnegie. Gorgias is a sophist--a Greek anti-philosopher who stresses rhetoric rather than reason, style rather than substance, profit rather than values. He teaches verbal flim-flammetry rather than philosophy.
- ❖ All the *hetaera or haitera* (dancers and flutists who double as prostitutes) who would normally be present at a symposium are absent after the philosophers kick them out of the house--at least until Alcibiades crashes the party with his own crew of such entertainers.
- ❖ **Diotema:** A (real? allegorical?) woman who taught Socrates love and philosophy